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Dmitrievsky and the Origins of National Bolshevism

by Mikhail Agursky

Meir Michaelis published in Soviet Jewish Affairs information from German archives concerning the activities of the former Soviet diplomat Sergey Dmitrievsky, Dmitrievsky, who in April 1930 requested political asylum in the West, subsequently attempted to enlist Nazi support in organising a mass Russian national socialist movement in order to bring about a "Russian national revolution" in the USSR. This was, specifically, the substance of a conversation in Stockholm in 1933 between Dmitrievsky and Brunhoff, an official at the German legation. In September 1940, Dmitrievsky appealed to the Nazi leader Reinhard Heydrich to do nothing at this time to impede the USSR's natural development into a national socialist regime. This plea aroused Heydrich's suspicions that Dmitrievsky might be a Soviet agent commissioned with the task of averting German military action against the USSR. Michaelis notes that Dmitrievsky, after breaking with Stalin, published several books, brochures and articles supporting Hitler and National Socialism. This does not, unfortunately, present an accurate picture of Dmitrievsky. For Dmitrievsky's main interest, in his public activities at least, was the glorification of Stalin and his coterie as heroes of the difficult and intense Russian national struggle against the "sinister dominance" of the Jewish internationalist clique.

What, then, was Dmitrievsky's motivation? Do his writings, in fact, reflect a specific reality, namely the consciously nationalistic activity of the Stalinist regime as early as the 1920s? Or do they constitute some sort of rationalisation the author set down in pursuance of enigmatic political ends? Alternatively, are we to come to the same con-

clusion as Heydrich, that Dmitrievsky was possibly an agent, whose purpose was to act on Stalin's behalf among the right-wing Russian emigré circles and to sound out the Nazis' intentions? In other words, was not Dmitrievsky simply an agent provocateur?

Let us attempt to answer these questions on the basis of Dmitrievsky's published works, since, at the present time, we have no other material at our disposal. According to the introduction to the French translation of his book Dans Les Coulisses du Kremlin (Paris, 1933), Dmitrievsky studied law at the University of St. Petersburg, and in February 1917 was employed by the Military Industrial Committee. Dmitrievsky affirms that he was a member of the Socialist Revolutionary party and maintains he was close to Savinkov. In 1918 he was active in the anti-Bolshevik underground, later moving to the south, where he joined the Union for the Rebirth of Russia, a movement dedicated to the overthrow of the Bolsheviks. In his book Sudba Rossii (Russia's Fate, Berlin, 1930), Dmitrievsky says he was arrested by the Bolsheviks and held in the Smolny, but does not indicate when exactly this took place. (We might note in passing that almost the only biographical data we have for Dmitrievsky derive from the author himself.) Dmitrievsky regards himself as a nationalist even during this period. In autumn 1918 he quit the Union for the Rebirth of Russia, a decision he attributes to unwillingness to help the foreign intervention, and in 1919 joined the Bolshevik party. After the Civil War, he edited the "Library of Scientific Socialism", and became Director of the People's University in Petrograd. Then he was appointed Commissar of the Supreme Military Academy and, shortly afterwards. Deputy Chief of the USSR Air Force, which was then still very small. Dmitrievsky was subsequently transferred to the People's Commissariat of Transport, headed at that time by Trotsky. In 1923 he was transferred to the diplomatic service and appointed General Secretary of the Soviet trade delegation in Berlin. In 1924 he was First Secretary at the Soviet embassy in Athens.² In the same year Dmitrievsky was appointed Acting Director of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, an appointment which demonstrates conclusively that he did not lack contacts within the apparatus.

In 1927, however, Dmitrievsky appears to have been noticeably demoted: he was appointed Counsellor in the Soviet embassy in Stockholm, from where, in 1930, he sought political asylum.

Why did Dmitrievsky join the Bolsheviks? According to him, he joined the party on behalf of some anonymous group which had reached the conclusion that "international communism is gradually regenerating in a doctrine close to Populist (Narodnik) maximalism, but with a more nationalistic complexion". The author nowhere indicates anyone with whom he was personally connected in the USSR — whether a sympathizer or simply a friend — but this can easily be explained by his unwillingness to cause difficulties for anyone.

After breaking with the Soviets, Dmitrievsky began to contribute to the Russian emigré press. He published, at first, a series of articles in the newspaper Rul' (The Helm), attracting the attention mainly of those circles which, like, for example, the "Young Russites", were sympathetically inclined towards the spontaneous growth of Russian nationalism in the USSR.⁴

Although Dmitrievsky was later to expand every idea he touched

upon in his first book, Sudba Rossii, this book is his most moderate in tone. Whether this moderation sprang from deliberate caution, or the author's ideology developed according to his experiences in the West, is difficult to say. Dmitrievsky's basic contention is that Russian nationalism is swiftly gaining momentum in the Soviet Union, and that the "Soviet reality" is endowed with many positive features reflecting the specifically Russian character of the Bolshevik Revolution. Even at this stage it is noticeable that Dmitrievsky is, essentially, fulfilling the role of apologist for Stalin. Although from time to time he makes remarks critical of the Soviet regime, these are, in context, of only secondary importance. Whereas subsequently the Jewish question becomes one of the central issues in Dmitrievsky's writings, it is dealt with in his first book rather by implication, insofar as issues relating to Russian nationalism are touched upon.

"The time will come," declares the author, "when the Russian revolution, after having settled within a natural, national framework, will have not only negative, but also positive results" (Sudba Rossii, p. 8). "Soviet power", he says, ". . . is, to all intents and purposes, national power that stems from the requirements of the people's life" (p. 40). To Dmitrievsky, Lenin was not only a revolutionary, but also a Russian national leader: "Lenin was a great Russian patriot. He loved Russia passionately" (p. 116). Dmitrievsky basically sees the growth of Russian nationalism as an elemental tendency: Thus, the komsomoltsy (Young Communists) who "sing the Internationale enthusiastically, are nationalists to a far greater extent than many others — even if they themselves are not aware of it" (p. 176). An organic source of this nationalism, the author stresses, is hatred of the West: "The Russian people have for many years been impregnated with the dreadful venom of hatred and mistrust of all things Western" (p. 11). On one hand, Dmitrievsky remarks, anti-communism is constantly on the increase in the USSR; on the other hand, this anti-communism presages no good for the West. "[The USSR] is now anti-communist", he claims, "as are the majority of members of the communist party; the country is permeated with the spirit of ever-increasing nationalism; the party too is permeated with nationalism" (p. 181). Although, in the author's view, the people detest the Soviet regime, "it is nonetheless their own - Russian regime . . . And our people are not defeatists and never were . . . I repeat, they detest the present regime. But at this moment, they detest the outside world even more" (p. 199).

Dmitrievsky proceeds to praise Stalin, though his praise is still couched in moderate terms. But even in this early work, the Bolshevik leader is unambiguously contrasted as a Russian nationalist with Trotsky: "Stalin is more formidable than all his rivals in the struggle for power. Stalin was, and is, stronger than Trotsky — in both will and intellect . . . He is said to be personally a very decent man" (p. 191). Dmitrievsky attributes to Stalin exceptional modesty, claiming that the Bolshevik leader always prefers to remain in the background. "Stalin sincerely strives for the people's welfare," he notes (p. 200).

Yet the author fails to conceal the antisemitic undertones which become clearly apparent in his later works. Acknowledging a considerable growth in antisemitism in the USSR — where "party members are predominantly antisemites" (p. 181) — Dmitrievsky sees this phenom-

enon as "unhealthy instincts". On the other hand, whereas Stalin is, in Dmitrievsky's words, a "great nationalist", Trotsky is simultaneously described as a "man alien to Russia" - both today's Russia and the future Russia: "For today's Russia he is too European, and for the future Russia — too much of a communist and lumpen-proletarian." "Just as Russia and the Russian people are only an object, only cannon fodder for Trotsky, so are Europe and the European masses exactly the same for Stalin" (p. 197). Dmitrievsky gives the impression of criticizing Stalin on this count but his criticism seems highly ambiguous. Thus, in the author's words, "the fundamental and principal erroneousness of Stalin's policies lies precisely in his contrasting Russia's special spiritual and physical world with that of the West" (p. 201). That this accusation sounds something of a compliment to a Russian nationalist, Dmitrievsky was very well aware. He is creating an aura of tragedy around Stalin, who, we are told, is surrounded by rapacious enemies, is a man doomed, and "will die, together with his cause" (ibid.). This could all be regarded as straightforward praise, yet another passage, in which Dmitrievsky speaks of Stalin as "a man of limited genius, a mediocrity of genius" (p. 193), causes us to doubt. Here too, the inclusion of the word "genius" renders the entire assessment of Stalin ambiguous.

Dmitrievsky's second book, Stalin (Berlin, 1931), is a veritable apotheosis of the Bolshevik leader. Here Dmitrievsky claims that the caricature of Stalin as a depraved monster and ideological nonentity was, basically, of Trotsky's creation: In fact, Stalin is an outstanding statesman, a staunch and courageous champion of the Russian national cause. Who knows, if not even before the Revolution he had not led that section of the Bolshevik party which always retained contact with the native soil — as opposed to the emigré section of the party, which was not even Russian in national composition! "The dispute between the movement's aristocrats and rank-and-file," says Dmitrievsky, "began long before the revolution" (Stalin, p. 89). Lenin, we are assured, thought more highly of Stalin than of anyone else - indeed, Stalin was his faithful pupil, though by no means a blind follower. Stalin's involvement in the Civil War, and particularly in the defence of Tsaritsyn, receives high praise. Interestingly, Dmitrievsky seeks, by whatever means he can, to emphasize the Russian origins of Leninism, whose traditions, he says, derive from Tkachev and Nechaev: the Marxist content of Leninism is limited to what he calls "methodology". Clearly influenced by the socalled "Eurasianism",* Dmitrievsky lays stress on Stalin's "Russian-Asiatic messianism".

On this occasion Dmitrievsky is overtly antisemitic: repeating the bitter attacks on Trotsky, he claims that around that leader was "grouped neither the Russian nor the Asiatic section of the party" (p. 267); "Trotsky did not care a fig about Russia as such . . . [he] was, and has remained, a Western imperialist from head to toe" (p. 268). But this is followed by a far more unambiguous reference to this "un-Russian and un-Asiatic section of the party". "And Krasin [for some reason, Dmitrievsky believed Krasin and Lunacharsky were Jews—M.A.] and Zinoviev and

^{*} i.e. that intellectual current of the Russian emigration which emphasized Russia's European-Asiatic character and distinguished her sharply from the West.

Gubelman, and thousands of others served the regime of the October revolution. They clung to the body of the new regime like flies to sweetbread. They did not believe in it, they detested it — and yet they served it. For the detested revolution of the *detested* people offered them rich pickings and positions of honour" (p. 271) (emphasis added).

Dmitrievsky's attitude towards the Jews does not, however, give the appearance of being of the pogrom variety. In defence of the thesis that the Jews have a utilitarian value, Dmitrievsky condemns the pogroms of the Whites (whom on the whole he extols — in particular Kornilov and Drozdovsky): the White leaders "failed to appreciate . . . that a large number of Jews, particularly the Jewish bourgeoisie, were and are — provided one approached them in an intelligent and liberal manner — a highly useful and important element for the Russian national cause" (p. 199).

Once again we are told that Stalin is a tragic, doomed character, who is "fated not to enter the future. He will fall at its threshold . . . He is doomed, as Robespierre was doomed" (pp. 24-25); "The Stalinist system is a transitory stage . . . a complete preparation for Caesarism" (p. 15).

Perhaps the most interesting section of the book is the introduction, which is a virtual programme of Russian national-Bolshevism. Calling for the creation of a new totalitarian party, the author bitterly attacks, albeit in a somewhat concealed manner, world Jewry, which he describes, at various times, as the "world petty-bourgeoisie", the "anti-national circles of capital", the carriers of "anti-national thought". "It is they," he writes, "who attempt to extinguish all that is national — to erase the specific features of every people and replace them with a nondescript mask of internationalism. It is they who pave the way for communism and Marxism" (p. 17).

In his next book, Sovetskie portrety (Soviet Portraits, Berlin, 1932), Dmitrievsky goes further still. While, on the one hand, he proclaims the necessity of the "Great National Revolution of the Russian People", he does not, on the other hand, consider this revolution would entail removing Stalin and his group from power. On the contrary, he hints in various ways that Stalin may remain in power even after the revolution—in spite of the fact that he describes the political system of the future as a "people's monarchy".

Dmitrievsky's view of the Russian Revolution here assumes an even more sinister antisemitic character: one has the impression that the author's tactic was to spread his increasingly antisemitic motifs gradually, from book to book. We are given a description of the difficult conditions of the pre-revolutionary Russian workers, who, we read, lived in

wretched rooms lit by a flickering candle or kerosene lamp; wan, emaciated, people with stern, ascetic faces, sat without sleep night after night pouring over books piled high to the ceiling... They manufactured diabolical bombs in those rooms. And each morning these very same people could be seen leaving their rooms, as though on their way out for a stroll, and standing around for hours on end with heavy packages under their arms, waiting for a state carriage to come clattering along the hollow paving-stones... They would fling their bombs, murder and die.

And the golden* serpent of the capitalist international crept through

those roomlets too. And shady foreigners and international adventurers and hired agents of capital, all having donned the mask of popular and revolutionary ideals, made their way here, wormed themselves in and took over. With them they brought alien ideas, they brought Marxism — this new gospel of capitalist thraldom — and in place of the slogans of the national and universal liberation struggle they substituted slogans of the class and anti-national struggle. They began running the revolution as a capitalist concern, as if it were a factory, investing vast resources, introducing the division of labour and rationalising the destruction-work. Thus it was that the golden international was able to bend to its will even the movers of the Russian people's revolution, and poison their minds with lies, and mould them into an instrument of its own. And when the revolution occurred, it was difficult to distinguish among this motley crew dominating Russia's body, the Russian people's revolutionary from the hireling of anti-national capital, the creator of the new Russia from the destroyer of everything Russian (Sovetskie portrety, p. 8)

Once again Dmitrievsky emphasizes that the Soviet regime is becoming increasingly national on account of the elemental force of Russian nationalism: "Those who made the revolution, even those at the summit of power, are beginning more and more, under pressure from the people and the people's life, to feel themselves Russians and nationalists" (p. 12). Lenin would seem already to have bequeathed "the programmatic outlines of Russian national socialism with its total rejection of Marxism", and "Russia has taken the national socialist path" (p. 150). To Dmitrievsky it is certain that "the Kremlin, the cradle and shrine of our land, will become once again the centre of the great empire of the Russian world" (p. 13).

In this book Molotov is Dmitrievsky's new hero in the struggle against Jewish domination: Molotov, we are told, thinks "in a Russian way", and was slandered by the Trotskyites as an "assiduous mediocrity". The author follows this with an interesting rationalisation of the bureaucratisation of party life in the USSR. It was essential, in Dmitrievsky's view, for power to be concentrated in the hands of the Central Committee secretariat for purposes of combatting the aliens. Molotov, according to Dmitrievsky, had rallied around Stalin "people who . . . sought instinctively to eliminate Marxism both in their own minds and in practice (they saw its embodiment in Trotsky and the riff-raff around him), and to replace [Marxism's] anti-national attitudes with the interests of the Russian nation and Russian state" (p. 127). It was, according to the author, Molotov who

made the party apparatus the awesome power it is even now. This had to be done, for the old Marxist internationalist clique against whom they were struggling occupied all the major state posts and dominated even the highest collective organs of the party. They could be beaten only by subjecting the state to the party apparatus — and by destroying "democratism" in the party itself: by giving precedence to the will of the General Secretary and the circles closest to him over the will of the collective organs, i.e., the oligarchy

^{*} In Black-Hundreds' terminology, "golden" signified Jewish.

of internationalists. This succeeded because it was an historical necessity. This was the beginning of the process of shifting the revolution onto national lines (p. 128).

Dmitrievsky also has kind words for Andreyev, Voroshilov, Menzhinsky, Ordzhonikidze and other, non-Jewish, party leaders. About Bukharin — after his political defeat — Dmitrievsky has, enigmatically, a kind word: "Bukharin is without doubt a man who will have a great deal more to say in the future — providing, of course, that he is not murdered" (p. 288). And of Krestinsky, the former member of the opposition, Dmitrievsky says warmly "[he is] Russian, Russian to the core!" (p. 256).

Dmitrievsky intensifies the attacks on Jewish leaders in the book. Trotsky, he says, "watched . . . Russia's destruction with sadistic delight" (p. 149). But now the new targets are Kaganovich, Yaroslavsky, Litvinov and Lunacharsky (whose "real" name is supposedly Khaimov). Kaganovich is "a second edition of Trotsky": he values material rewards above all else, champions Trotsky's ideas, and is said to have joined the Bolshevik party through hatred of the Russian nation; he is "guilty of intrigues against the Right [i.e., the followers of Bukharin]".

As for Yaroslavsky, his ideas too, we are told, are those of Trotsky, whom he betrayed for mercenary considerations. Yaroslavsky, supported by Kaganovich, "took the cause of the struggle against Christianity to its furthest limits" (p. 214), since "attacking the Orthodox religion" was the best way to destroy the Russians' national features" (ibid.). Yaroslavsky was behind the demolition of the famous Christ-the-Saviour church in Moscow, while Stalin had, supposedly, been obliged to "intervene" against the anti-religious campaign "for the purpose of calming things down" (?!). Finally, the activities of Kaganovich and Yaroslavsky provoked a "sharp reaction amongst the Russian majority of the party, which began to exert pressure on Molotov and, through him, Stalin Stalin realized that things were taking a dangerous turn for him" (p. 216).

As for Litvinov, in Dmitrievsky's view, he and "national Russia are incompatible" (p. 251). The only exception among the Jewish leaders appears to be Grigory Sokolnikov: "He is a Jew, but from those circles of the Jewish intelligentsia that consider the Russian cause to be their own" (p. 289).

It should be noted that we are here witnessing the origin of myths which, 30-40 years later, were to re-appear in the works of such antisemitic Soviet writers as Ivan Shevtsov, Yury Ivanov, Vladimir Begun and others. The striking resemblance between the myths as they appear in Dmitrievsky's writings and as they re-appear in contemporary Soviet literature, seems to point to the direct influence of Dmitrievsky's works or of an unofficial oral tradition handed down through the years.

Of the Soviet leaders to whom Dmitrievsky alludes, not a single word is said of Sergey Kirov, which is a very curious omission indeed. Kirov, who was then at the zenith of his fame, belonged with no doubt whatever to the authentically Russian part of the Soviet leadership, which was all the more opposed to Trotsky and the opposition. Why then this silence? The author gives no indications at all on this score. We can only presume that Dmitrievsky is reflecting some sort of unofficial system of values in which Kirov, for some reason, is not included. Assuming that

Dmitrievsky really was an agent of Stalin, is this not an early indication that Kirov had long since been marked out for elimination? All this is, of course, no more than speculation, but perhaps at some time in the future information will be found providing the key to the solution of this problem.

Dmitrievsky also published many articles containing variations of the ideas he put forward in his books and intensifying, step by step, his nationalistic and antisemitic tendency. Thus, he wrote in one article that "everything Russian in Russia is being trampled on and debased; the country and Russian culture have been taken over by aliens". In another, earlier, article Dmitrievsky claimed that Stalin was preparing a national-revolutionary government.

Dmitrievsky in time tackles the issue of German National Socialism, which clearly delights him: "I would not say that Hitler is a bad thing," he wrote in 1932, "No, he is even a very good thing." In 1934, Dmitrievsky published a book on Hitler, but in Swedish. However, unlike all his other books, this book was never published in Russian, which is something of a mystery.

Dmitrievsky's position was very ambiguous. Firstly, it is unclear why he fled the USSR if Stalin's policies made such a positive impression on him. His own explanation is, basically, that, despite all Stalin's efforts, the country was still in the grip of aliens, and their domination made life in the USSR unbearable. The true liberation — the Russian National Revolution — still lay ahead. Dmitrievsky frequently apologises to his readers for "having been unable to withstand the difficulties" and having left the USSR. This ambiguity was noted by many.8 Nonetheless, Dmitrievsky was welcomed by those circles of emigrés who sought to detect an increase of Russian nationalism — whether elemental or conscious — in the USSR. The polemics between Dmitrievsky and Nikolay Ustryalov, the principal ideologist of smenovekhovstvo* and the founder of Russian National Bolshevism, were characteristic in this respect. Ustryalov criticized Dmitrievsky's idea as put forward by the author in the introduction to his book Stalin, on the grounds that the "Russianrevolutionary process can and must be destroyed only by an organic, internal process".9 Ustryalov at the same time described Dmitrievsky as "a man . . . who had successfully demonstrated . . . that the Soviet revolution was profoundly organic, of universal historical import and nationally justifiable".10

Trotsky's own reaction to Dmitrievsky presents some interest. Although three extracts from Dmitrievsky's books were discovered in his note-books, it is not certain whether he intended to use them either to confirm or reject their contents. However, in various sections of his book on Stalin, Trotsky directly confirms the veracity of information given by Dmitrievsky. Thus, Trotsky quotes as authentic Dmitrievsky's account of Lenin's quarrel with Stalin in 1922. Trotsky himself characterized Dmitrievsky as

a former Soviet diplomat, a chauvinist and anti-Semite, who temporarily joined Stalin's faction during its struggle against Trotskyism

^{*} Smena bekh (Prague, 1921; Paris, 1921-22) expressed a tendency of the non-communist Russian intelligentsia to come to terms with the Soviet regime.

and later, while abroad, deserted to the camp of the Right wing of the White emigration. It is significant that even as a functioning outright Fascist Dmitrievsky continues to regard Stalin highly, to detest all of his opponents and to repeat all the legends of the Kremlin.13

It should be noted that Trotsky takes all Dmitrievsky's statements at face value, and does not claim that Dmitrievsky simply invented his account of Stalin's activities for specific purposes. This, of course, is not a decisive argument in its favour, since it was advantageous to Trotsky to support it at the time he wrote his book on Stalin. Trotsky did not, however, react to Dmitrievsky's books at the time of their publication; as for his book on Stalin, this was written after his article "Thermidor and Antisemitism" in 1937.14

To return to Michaelis' article, which sheds new light on Dmitrievsky, one should not rule out entirely Heydrich's opinion that Dmitrievsky was possibly a Soviet agent.15 But in any case, Dmitrievsky's activities are important material for the study of Russian nationalism as the USSR's state ideology, since despite existing views on the spontaneous nature of this process, 16 his activities indicate also the conscious element in the process. Also, a comparison of the antisemitic myths which appear in Dmitrievsky's works with those reflected in contemporary Soviet literature, may provide rich material on the early, veiled, antisemitic tradition in Soviet society.

¹ Soviet Jewish Affairs, vol. 5, no. 2, 1975.
2 For further information concerning Dmitrievsky's work in the Athens embassy, see Alexander Barmin, Memoirs of a Soviet Agent, London, 1938. According to Barmin, Dmitrievsky served under Ambassador A. M. Ustinov, who, interestingly, was also an ex-SR. Ustinov was arrested by the NKVD in 1937 when Soviet envoy to Estonia and died shortly afterwards. Barmin recalls that Ustinov and Dmitrievsky introduced him to Athens' 'night life'.
3 S. Dmitrievsky, Sudba Rossii, p. 40.
4 See A. Kazem-Bek, 'Natsionalizm i internationalizm v Rossii' (Nationalism and Internationalism in Russia), Miladorost, no. 4, Paris, 1930.

Paris, 1930.
5 "Protiv passivnosti" (Against Passivity),
Utverzhdeniya (Assertions), no. 3, Paris,

<sup>1932.
6 &</sup>quot;O nashem istoricheskom zavtra" (Our Historic Tomorrow), *Utverzhdeniya*, no. 1, 1931.
7 Hitler, Stockholm, 1934.

⁸ Cf. Gleb Struve, Russkaya literatura v izgnanii (Russian Literature in Exile), New York, 1956. 9 Nikolay Ustryalov, "Zarubezhnaya smena" (A Change of Generation Abroad), Utverzh-deniya, no. 3, 1932.

¹¹ L. Trotsky, Stalin, London, 1968, pp. 293-94.

¹² Îbid., pp. 374-5.

¹³ Ibid., p. 71.

¹³ Ibid., p. 71.
14 Cf. J. Nedava, Trotsky and the Jews, Philadelphia, 1972.
15 Interestingly, Barmin says of Dmitrievsky's book "[It is] a very remarkable book, which . . . seemed to me to bear the definite marks of official inspiration", Barmin, op. cit., p. 203.
16 Cf. F. Barghoorn, Soviet Russian Nationalism, New York, 1956; E. Oberländer, Sovietpatriotismus und Geschichte, Cologne, 1967.